An Imprinting Organization Development Experience
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I came to action research and, indeed, my academic career in organization behavior, due in part to "imprinting" experiences near the beginning of my first full-time job. These experiences taught me two things: 1) Organization Development was powerful, and 2) there *had* to be a better way to conduct OD interventions than the ones I was experiencing.

In the fall of 1969 I was a new high school teacher. The school where I was teaching had hired three Organization Development consultants to work with our faculty at faculty meetings that August. The aim was to foster enhanced faculty participation in school decision-making, especially using consensus methods, and in general to lessen hierarchical structures in the school. We participated in a several day OD workshop in August, in short sessions in the fall, and a day-long workshop in January.

The OD effort had quite negative effects. To make a long and complicated story very short, its focus on more equal participation led at least one faculty member to believe that if he acted in ways that were inappropriate and improper with female students (which he did) the principal did not have the authority or legitimacy to unilaterally stop him. When the principal of the school found out what he was doing she did order him to stop and threatened to fire him if he didn't change his behavior.

Before this could happen, at the beginning of the day long OD workshop in January he and two friends stood up and dramatically announced that they were resigning, because of the general lack of a collaborative climate in the school, but they would consider an invitation back if it was made. Despite the fact that only the school principal had knew what had happened, and for appropriate reasons was not telling other faculty members present, the OD consultants led the faculty in spending the entire day consulting with the principal on whether to invite the three people back. "We" eventually decided not to invite them back. After that meeting there were no more consultants and was no talk of, or wish for, participation in decision making by anybody for the rest of the school year.

The following summer I helped run a summer camp for inner city and suburban children. The camp counselors included both inner city and suburban high school students. In order to assist their working together, OD consultants were called in to conduct introductory workshops.

The workshops were so successful in getting the camp counselors to bond with each other that the camp counselors decided they were more interested in spending time with each other than in working with the youngsters attending the

camp. They often left all of campers involved in a game like kickball while they spent time with each other.

The combination of outcomes was quite puzzling. In the prior experience the OD intervention clearly hadn't worked. In this case the OD intervention had succeeded, but so well that it had interfered with the camp counselors actually doing the work they were supposed to. This was clearly powerful, but couldn't it have its intended impacts?

These early experiences affected my choice to get a doctorate in social and organizational psychology. They also led me to be interested in action research as an underlying framework for organization development. In particular, they affected my desire as a researcher to study various forms of OD interventions and many other types of planned organizational change efforts as these have evolved over the course of the past 30 years or so.

Over time, it has become evident to me and many others that the intervention tools that used to be used for OD when I first participated in it (such as consensus exercises) are inadequate for even beginning to accomplish meaningful (and effective) organizational change. It has also become evident that scholarly understandings of organizational change, its processes and its outcomes, require the ability to see change efforts with the eyes of multiple participants in a change effort. These include the change agents as well as multiple other categories of participants.

This latter point was brought home forcibly in a study I was conducting about 15 years ago of a change effort in a school. The principal was interested in me studying the change effort, in part, I eventually came to learn, because she was sure it would be a success, and thus she hoped that I would write about the success. When the change effort was not successful in the original time frame in which I was studying it, the principal did not want me to write about it, because, as she put it, why would one want to write about something (even in a scholarly way) that seemed to be a failure?

My reflection on the principal's concerns, as well as the differing viewpoints I had experienced in a wide variety of change situations, led me to develop means of studying and writing about practitioner-led action research projects in which I, as an external researcher, collaborate with members of the setting to describe and analyze what happened there and then to write about the events (e.g. Bartunek et al., 2000; Bartunek et al., 1996; Bartunek et al., 1999; Bartunek & Louis, 1996). In joint insider-outsider analyses the writing itself becomes a kind of action research project in which insider authors reflect on their experience together with the external researcher. All of those involved have the opportunity learn from their experience, and in some cases, at least, the insider authors start to act differently on the basis of the learning.

Over the course of time my aims for exploring planned organizational change and action research methods have changed; I know better than to assume that any planned change methodology will be successful according to all participants' assessments.   But I hope I'm contributing to a broader understanding of the dynamics involved in change efforts and of ways they affect the outcomes experienced.

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